

ACTION WHA-00

UNCLASSIFIED E65
RELEASED IN PART
B1, 1.4(B), 1.4(D)

INFO	LOG-00	MFA-00	NP-00	AID-00	A-00	ACQ-00	CCO-00
	CEA-01	CG-00	COME-00	CTME-00	INL-00	DINT-00	DOEE-00
	DOTE-00	PERC-00	SRPP-00	DS-00	EB-00	ED-01	EXIM-01
	E-00	FAAE-00	FBIE-00	VC-00	FRB-00	HHS-01	H-01
	TEDE-00	INR-00	INSE-00	IO-00	ITC-01	LAB-01	L-00
	CAC-00	VCE-00	M-00	AC-01	NRCE-00	NSAE-00	OCS-03
	OIC-02	OMB-01	DHS-00	OPIC-01	PA-00	TFBI-00	PM-00
	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00	SCT-00	SP-00	SSO-00	SS-00
	STR-00	TRSE-00	USIE-00	USSS-00	ASDS-00	R-00	EPAE-00
	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-01	G-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00

/016W

-----7C47A6 262041Z /38

R 262000Z JUN 03
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7417
INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS
CIA WASHDC
DEA HQS WASHDC
DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC
DIA WASHDC
DIRONDCP WASHDC
JOINT STAFF WASHDC
NIMA NAVY YARD WASHINGTON DC
SECDEF WASHDC
USCINCSO MIAMI FL
NSC WASHDC
WHITE HOUSE WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 005995

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/26/2033
TAGS: PGOV, PTER, PINS, MCAP, PHUM, PREF, ECON, PINR, SOCI,
CO
SUBJECT: URIBE'S DEMOCRATIC SECURITY STRATEGY: IMPACT IN
ARAUCA DEPARTMENT

REF: A. BOGOTA 02764
B. BOGOTA 01408
C. BOGOTA 05823

Classified By: Ambassador Anne W. Patterson. Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

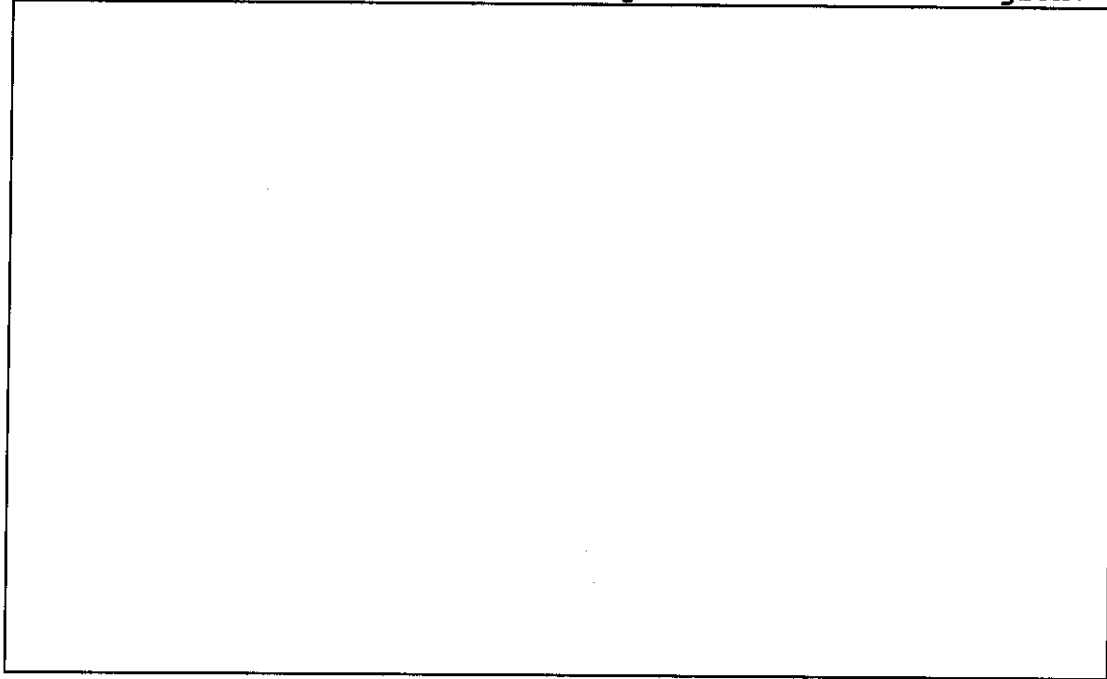
Summary

1. (C) This is the second cable in a series that will survey

UNCLASSIFIED

the security situation in various regions of Colombia ten months after President Uribe took office. On June 19-20, polooffs visited Arauca city, the capital of Arauca Department, to assess the security situation in the region.

B1



Arauca Department, The Enemy's Home Turf

2. (U) Polooffs visited Arauca city, capital of Arauca Department, on June 19-20 as part of the Embassy's survey of the security situation in various areas of the country ten months after President Uribe took office. Arauca, a small city of about 64,000 inhabitants, is located on the south bank of the Arauca River, which marks the border with Venezuela. The National Liberation Army (ELN) has controlled Arauca city and the rest of the department for over twenty years. During that time, the ELN infiltrated nearly all sectors of the departmental government and civil society (ref A). In the last two years, however, both the FARC and the paramilitaries have made significant inroads in the department. In September of last year, President Uribe declared a special rehabilitation and consolidation zone that encompassed the capital and two other municipalities, Arauquita and Saravena. Although the Constitutional Court struck down the decree extending the duration of the rehabilitation zones in April, oil-rich Arauca department remains an important theater of operations for the security forces.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

----- Police, Army Presence Doubled, But Still Not Enough -----

3. (U) According to Colombian National Police (CNP) Col. Luis Alcides Morales, who commands all police forces in Arauca Department, the Police have doubled their forces in the department over the past ten months. Even so, the whole department still has only about 1,000 police officers to cover nearly 9,300 square miles (24,000 square kilometers) and protect approximately 265,000 inhabitants. The CNP has also adopted a more aggressive posture, particularly in the city of Arauca. Poloffs personally noticed that patrols in the city are frequent. At the same time, the Police are also carrying out community outreach programs to win over a civilian population long accustomed to insurgent control. As part of this effort, the CNP is dedicating 50 police auxiliaries (conscripts) to outreach tasks, such as providing entertainment for the populace. Col. Morales stated that these community outreach programs are key to the CNP's

strategy to regain control of the department, and appear to be working quite well.

4. (U) The Colombian Army, for its part, has also boosted its troop strength in the department considerably since President Uribe took office. Soon after the GOC established the rehabilitation zone in Arauca, the military deployed one mobile brigade to the department, according to 18th Brigade commander Brigadier General Carlos Lemus. Today, the 5th Mobile Brigade, made up of approximately 1,100 soldiers, is still stationed in Arauca, even though the rehabilitation zone no longer exists. Even with these additional forces, however, the Army faces a daunting task in controlling Arauca Department. Local Army units do not have an airlift capability, which greatly limits their mobility. Most Army deployments are done via overland travel, which becomes much harder during the six month long rainy season, when most of eastern Arauca is flooded and roads are treacherous. In addition, the insurgents are able to cross the border into Venezuela with ease, making the Government's task of securing the department harder.

5. (U) As in other parts of the country, the GOC's Peasant (or Hometown) Soldier program is being implemented in Arauca Department. Gen. Lemus stated that the first peasant soldier units were deployed to Cravo Norte, Puerto Rondon, and Tame municipalities because these areas had somewhat better security than the other municipalities in the department.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

The recently completed second phase of the program entailed deployment of one peasant soldier platoon to Saravena municipality, one of the department's most problematic areas.

The Army is also engaging in civic outreach programs; it recently sponsored a "brigada de salud," which provided health care for some of the department's poorest citizens.

----- Slow But Encouraging Results For Security Policy -----

6. (U) Nearly all interlocutors spoke with agreed that violence in Arauca department has gone down somewhat after peaking in late 2002 and early 2003. Several interlocutors, including Governor Oscar Munoz, CNP Col. Morales, Army 18th Brigade commander Gen. Lemus, the local office of the Human Rights Ombudsman (Personeria), the Special Prosecutor (Fiscalia), and the department's Inspector General (Procuraduria), all noted that GOC efforts to date have rolled back the insurgents' urban presence considerably, and that the security forces are slowly rolling back insurgent control of government institutions and public finances. This change has been most visible in urban areas, particularly in Arauca city, Puerto Rondon, and Cravo Norte. Governor Oscar Munoz noted that some violence indicators are down department-wide, and that local and departmental government personnel are now able to carry out their jobs, in marked contrast to October of last year, when the departmental assembly was closed, several mayors fled into exile, and several local government officials were killed by insurgents. CNP Col. Morales stated that he believes the security situation in the department has "slowly turned a corner" and is gradually beginning to improve. Gen. Lemus estimated that it will take two to three years of sustained effort by the security forces and law enforcement to achieve a major improvement in the security situation.

B1

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

8. (U) Violence in Arauca remains high, although the security forces have made some limited progress in reducing it in the last four months. Official departmental government and Army

figures indicate that the number of murders in the department rose to 184 in the first five months of 2003, up from 129 during the same period the year before. Tame remains by far the most violent municipality in the department, accounting for just over half of the murders in Arauca this year. Attacks against energy infrastructure, by contrast, are flat; in the first five months of the year, the insurgents carried out 16 attacks (9 against the oil pipeline and 7 against power pylons), roughly keeping pace with the 37 attacks (26 against the pipeline and 11 against power pylons) in all of 2002, which itself was a dramatic decrease from over 110 attacks in 2001. Kidnappings are down from 30 in the first five months of 2002 to 21 in the first five months of this year. Terrorist attacks have also gone down over the past few months, from a high in January and February of about 18 a month to just 4 each in April and May. This decrease in terrorist attacks has led to a decrease in the number of persons wounded by these attacks, from a high of 35 in January to just 8 in April and 6 in May.

9. (C) Although Arauca remains a violent city, anecdotal information points to a measurable improvement in the security environment.

B1

UNCLASSIFIED

11. (U) The GOC has dealt with this situation by suspending oil royalty transfers to the department (ref B) and by appointing a new governor who is not part of the department's political class. The security forces, for their part, have implemented community outreach programs to befriend the local population and ease its fears about the increased military and police presence in their towns. Many of these programs are starting to bear fruit, but much remains to be done. The civilian population, particularly in rural areas, is still somewhat uncomfortable with the military and police presence, according to the Inspector General and the Special Prosecutor. The Inspector General, however, emphasized that he had no credible evidence that the security forces were systematically abusing the population or collaborating with paramilitaries. He stated that he was currently investigating a handful of cases involving mistreatment of civilians by the security forces, but that the overall behavior of both the military and the police in the department was good. The Inspector General noted that the only case he was investigating that involved paramilitaries and military or police personnel was the extrajudicial murder of a local paramilitary leader by a CNP officer.

12. (U) All the interlocutors spoke with highlighted the need for the GOC to follow up on its increased military presence with social spending in order to further cement its control of the area. Gen. Lemus and Col. Morales both were particularly insistent on this point.

Rate of Displacement Remains Stable

13. (U) According to data from the local office of the Social Solidarity Network ("Red de Solidaridad Social") (RSS), the IDP problem in Arauca Department had abated somewhat in the first four months of 2003 compared to the same period last year; the number of new IDPs was down to 537 from 885. In mid-May, however, a mass displacement took place in Tame municipality, bringing this year's five month total of new IDPs to 1,250, just ahead of last year's five month total of 1,118. The RSS stated that most of the displacements in the department are the result of paramilitaries advancing into formerly insurgent-dominated areas.

UNCLASSIFIED

14. (U) The Governor, Gen. Lemus, and Col. Morales stated that the most recent wave of IDPs from Tame were unique in that they had been driven from their homes by the insurgents, and their "leaders" were actually insurgent sympathizers who were pushing for an end to military operations in Tame. To bolster this assertion, the Governor provided polooffs with copies of several communiques issued by the group's leaders, which blame the displacement on abuses committed by the military and the police and rail against President Uribe's "paramilitary policies." The 18th Brigade also provided pictures of recent damage done by the insurgents in those areas the IDPs had fled, and stated that most of the IDPs wanted to return but were being pressured not to by certain ELN-backed organizations. The Governor and the 18th Brigade also pointed out that the insurgents, who had declared an armed strike in solidarity with the IDPs, were also supporting the IDPs' demands. During the armed strike, the insurgents banned all overland transportation in the department.

Comment

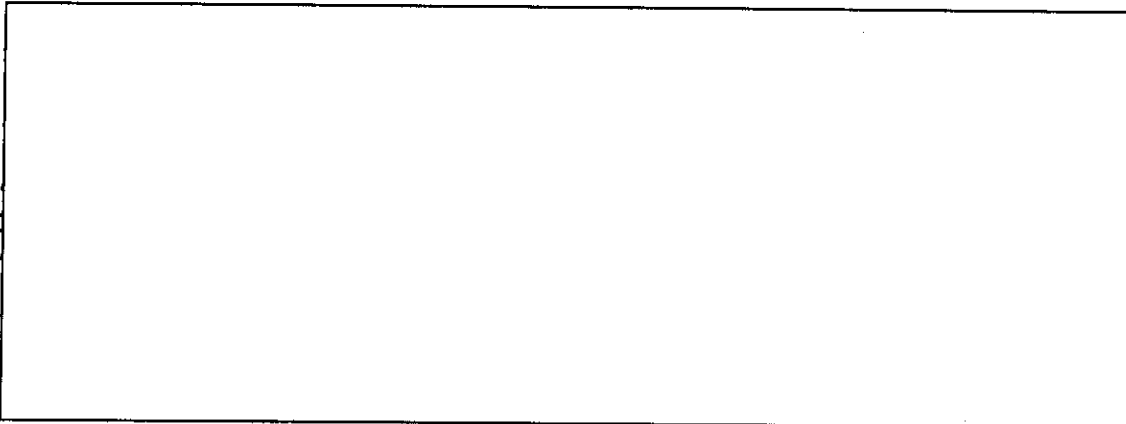
15. (C) The security situation in Arauca is slowly improving after a sharp rise in violence late last year, when the insurgents lashed out against GOC efforts to assert Government control over the department.

B1



Progress
is most visible in urban areas, particularly in Arauca city, but much remains to be done.

B1



UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

B1

PATTERSON
NNNN

UNCLASSIFIED